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THE STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS OF TAMMANY HALL.

BY WALTER L. HAWLEY.

THE organization that has so long dominated, demoralized and disgraced municipal government in the city of New York is mistakenly classed as a political faction—the regular form of one of the great political parties of the country. It is true that one of the elements of strength of Tammany has been nominal party regularity and ostentatious adherence to alleged partisan principles, but the mass of its membership know little, and care less, about national questions that are designated as campaign issues. Tammany is essentially a close corporation held together by a carefully adjusted community of selfish interests.

Those persons who would credit one man with a genius of organization to encompass the recent successes of the organization must lose sight of the fact that for almost one hundred years Tammany has never been exterminated and rarely defeated in city elections. No purely political reason will fully explain such a record. While party regularity is an element of strength, the chief sources of its recuperative and enduring powers must be sought for outside of partisan feeling.

Tammany avails itself of all the tricks of partisanship to unite and hold together antagonistic racial, religious and social elements of society, but no party creed in this country has endured for a century; so the real strength of this organization must be looked for beneath the surface of its campaign declarations. Americans proud of the individual liberty assured by their form of government are slow to admit that racial or religious influences exist in politics and public affairs. Tammany exists and dominates the city of New York by skillfully combining, under the creed of

self-interest, race and religious prejudice. This assertion may be denied; it cannot be disproved.

Of the thirty-five district leaders of Tammany, the men who compose the Executive Committee and decree its policy, an average of thirty are Irish Catholics. The others are Germans and Jews. These three elements of the community supply the working membership of the organization, with the Irish dominant in numbers and influence. The real voting strength of Tammany lies in channels of social and religious sentiment that are the basis of collective gratitude and individual self-interest. The Association is organized and in business at all times. It brings the lower strata of society into harmless and harmonious good-fellowship at free entertainments, and knows neither creed nor clan in the distribution of its charities and non-political favors.

In brief, Tammany relies for much of its voting and moral strength upon three elements of human nature—gratitude, avarice and religious sentiment. Those who have accepted its charity and kindly favors feel grateful; those who have learned its methods are hopeful of material reward, if they serve it; and the creeds it sustains are tolerant of its misdeeds. It keeps city government down to the level and the understanding of the majority, hiding the weakness and subterfuge of such methods under banners of alleged protection of the rights of the masses.

This system that so easily blends and binds into one harmonious whole all the antagonistic elements of races, religions, social conditions and political theories is not vicious and corrupt for the mere love of sinning. It will protect vice or promote morality with equal energy and success, if the cash consideration is the same. Tammany has no higher aim, in fact no cause for existence, except to make money for those who compose and control the organization. The control of the city government is merely a means to an end. Power provides opportunity. Therefore Tammany purchases power with the favors of politics. It aids and abets crime because criminals can be made to pay for assistance in cash and can then be frightened into silence. It fawns upon the rich and powerful when proffering the favors that will buy their aid or indifference, and crushes the weak and poor when they cease to yield revenue.

Tammany grows strong and wins with the aid of the greed and selfishness of rich and intelligent citizens, skillfully com-

bined with the ignorance and avarice of the poor. Its moral and intellectual standards are kept down to the level of the slums, because the voting strength of the tenement and the mansion are as ten to one. When secure in control of the city and county government, this system has never elected or appointed to an important office a man of great ability or high moral character. Its representatives in Congress and the State Legislature rank with the lowest in capacity and fitness. Its agents in the highest city offices and on the bench have been, as a rule, men who could be trusted to work for the interests of the organization. No man of independent spirit, no man of superior intelligence and honorable record need seek political preferment at the hands of Tammany when it is secure in power. This favoritism of mediocrity is a part of its strength, an important feature of the political policy of the organization.

The system draws an arbitrary line through the registered voters of the city. On one side of that line it places the criminals, the vicious, the unscrupulous, the poor, the partially educated and the ignorant. On the other side are placed the men of property, education and refinement, and those willing to barter money or influence for special favors of politics and government. The divisions may be classified as the taxpayers and the non-taxpayers. The latter outnumber the substantial citizens ten to one, and from the larger division come the votes that keep Tammany in power. Seven-tenths of the men on one side of the line are constantly seeking office, city employment, political preference, protection for vice and crime, or some material favor from the ruling power that will give them advantage over competition in business or professional work. Tammany strives to favor the multitudes; therefore, the moral and intellectual tone of local government is kept down to the level of the masses.

Good breeding and education do not always constitute absolute disqualification for holding office under Tammany, but there is one requirement that is essential—the applicant must be worth something to the organization in money, votes or influence. He must pay a fixed sum in cash for the nomination or appointment, must be able to deliver on election day a certain number of votes of relatives or friends, or through his social, church or society connection he must be able to exercise a certain amount of influence that will be useful in time of need. This system of elec-

tion, appointment and advancement is followed to the letter. Governing a city is a matter of business, according to the Tammany creed. The voters deliver the offices and all the power of administration into the hands of the organization. Those offices and the power to protect and to punish are for the time being the goods and chattels of Tammany to be sold to the highest bidder. It is the commerce of politics, and those who follow the trade must thrive. There are men in Tammany whose personal honesty outside of politics has never been questioned. If their moral sense is blunted, it is because of the false teaching of a criminal system. They can grant favors. What is the wrong, they ask, of accepting favors in return? The bill goes to the taxpayers in the end.

Antagonism to civil service or any other system of requiring intellectual and educational fitness for public service is a part of the Tammany policy that goes with the plan of picking out men who may control votes. During campaigns the orators of the organization rail against "Reformers" and civil service to good purpose. In the tenement districts they tell the young men that if "Reformers" got control of the city only college graduates could obtain public office. They make this lie plausible and prove the friendship of Tammany for the poor and ignorant by appointing to important offices men who are uneducated and unfit. To the half-taught, narrow-minded young generation just out of the public schools there is no lesson of debased government and indifferent public opinion so convincing as the one they see around them day after day. When they see at the head of great departments of the city government men who a few years ago were "Mike, the butcher," and "Jim of the liquor store on the corner," the example does not stimulate them to strive for the learning of books or the refinements of higher life. Such examples exist; not a few isolated cases, but many, where great public improvements, grave questions of public policy for the present and the future are in the hands of Tammany's recruits from the butcher shop, the brewery wagon and the saloon. These men promise the ideal government of the people by Tammany for Tammany. They keep the tone of the public service down to the big crowd across the dividing line, and the young voter, weak and ignorant rather than vicious, the criminal ready to pay a royalty from the profits of crime, and the loafer who shuns honest labor, all know that such is the government that has always existed and

always will exist under the system that is Tammany, and that it cannot exist under any other system. They ask no other reason, no greater inducement to vote the Tammany ticket.

The strength of Tammany is the strength of brute force and animal cunning combined, but it is strength that the good citizen who seeks better government can neither ignore nor despise. It must be met and overcome, and the real fight must be fought out in the arena, down in the slums where the Tiger was trained.

A change of leaders could not change the system. Men of property are willing to pay for special privileges and exemptions for the benefit of their private business. When in control of the city government Tammany has such favors to sell and sells them. It is the commerce of politics. Crime is always willing to share profits with a power that can make crime safe. That power is Tammany. For the voting rabble offices are created, or employment provided. Places with good pay and no work are powerful factors in building up and sustaining a political organization. The city departments are honeycombed with sinecures. One or two more places can always be provided, if the political pressure is strong enough or the cash consideration adequate. Ten thousand employees of the city of New York at the present time could be dropped from the pay-roll in a day and the public service would be benefited rather than crippled. The ten thousand surplus men are Tammany workers and voters. They know that they would soon be out of employment under honest and businesslike government; therefore they are for Tammany. This system of blackmail, favoritism, ignorance, brutality and barefaced robbery of the taxpayers holds fast to itself the ignorant, the vicious and the criminal. There lies the chief voting strength of Tammany.

The weakness of Tammany, like its strength, lies in the unchangeable characteristics of human nature. Its chief bond of cohesion is human selfishness or greed, and no other tie is so easily broken. It is never disinterested; never grateful. When the units of its strength weaken they are cast out. It is loyal to no leader, faithful to no man, beyond the stage of intense self-interest. Its party loyalty is a pretense; its devotion to principles a sham.

Three-fourths of the votes that sustain Tammany are the ballots of real or imaginary self-interest, the votes of men who have

received or expect material reward in one form or another. The other fourth are contributed by men who are sentimentally attached to the party creed and name under which Tammany masquerades. A growth of intelligent citizenship to the stage that will enable the masses to realize that their material interests will be best served by better city government will defeat Tammany and destroy it. The system has nothing to offer beyond the transient rewards of debased politics. It is a fungus growth on imperfect social and political conditions that will decay and die in the light of universal intelligence.

WALTER L. HAWLEY.